

**Submission
No 120**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Institute of Animal Management

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AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ANIMAL MANAGEMENT SUBMISSION

NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The Australian Institute of Animal Management (AIAM) is the national peak body representing Local Government Animal Management Officers. The Board of AIAM consists of a wide range of professionals engaged in the various aspects of companion animal management.

AIAM seeks to support those engaged in the business of companion animal management, and the function itself, by providing training and information, opportunities for networking and collaboration and by encouraging the use of best practice policy and practices. AIAM promotes consistency of legislation, consultation in the creation of legislation and workplace processes and healthy relationships with external stakeholders and the community. AIAM supports cross sector collaboration and co-design of projects and initiatives. The Board of AIAM welcome the opportunity to engage and advocate at all levels on topics relevant to or inclusive of companion animal management.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this vital discussion and welcome the chance to provide further insights on the recommendations detailed below.

Executive Summary

The Australian Institute of Animal Management, representing Local Government Animal Management Officers and professionals engaged in companion animal management, offers valuable insights on the challenges facing New South Wales's companion animal management sector including municipal shelters.

Our recommendations to the Portfolio Committee are as follows:

- 1. Regulate reproduction of community cat populations:** Explore more efficacious, financially sustainable, and socially acceptable alternative pathways to reduce reproduction of community cat populations and mitigate the influx of kittens and young adult cats into the system.
- 2. Reevaluate existing intake system:** Explore the feasibility of achieving positive outcomes by providing support to animals within their existing environments or through alternative strategies.
- 3. Utilise ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animals Shelters:** Issue guidance and support to use the Guidelines recommendations and standards of care for animals in NSW municipal shelters.
- 4. Guiding Principles for Animal Services:** Develop universally agreed guiding principles, like the Socially Conscious Sheltering or Human Animal Support Services models, ensuring a cohesive approach across organisations.

5. **Enhanced Reporting Structures:** Expand reporting standards for NSW local governments to include registered rehoming organisations, aligning with the Shelters Animals Count Basic Matrix for transparency and as a minimum standard.
6. **Public Data Availability:** Make collected data accessible and provide guidance to NSW Local Governments on its use to inform animal management, funding, and progress assessment.
7. **Comprehensive Training:** Implement thorough training on evidence based, systematic behaviour assessment, in-shelter care, and pet adoption.
8. **Stakeholder coalitions:** Encourage the formation and use of “stakeholder coalitions” for each community/municipality, and at state level, to maximise cooperation, collaboration, resourcing, and the improvement of relationships between government and non-government service providers.
9. **Revamped Funding Model:** Replace the 'user pays' system with community-wide, government-funded models for equitable companion animal management services.
10. **Owner Support Services:** Clearly define responsibility for preventing intake through owner support, backed by regulatory support and funding.
11. **High-Quality, High Volume Spay/Neuter Services:** Consult with the veterinary sector on their capacity to provide broadscale HQHVSN services to the sector, and communities more broadly.
12. **Shelter-Specific Training:** Consult Registered Training Organisations on their capacity to offer accessible shelter-specific training for local governments and rehoming organisations.
13. **State provision of the following services to Local Governments:**
 - Access to a reference library of accurate, evidence-based reference materials and resources, and associated continuing education opportunities for development of evidence-based, progressive animal management and rehoming services.
 - Access to, with the requirement to use, shelter management software with the capability to produce compliant reporting for animal services and outcomes.
 - Compulsory, in-depth training on modern, systematic behaviour assessment, in-shelter care, and adoption of pet dogs and cats
14. **Prevent 'Warehouse-Style' Facilities:** Issue guidance against large, multi-council facilities to prioritise animal outcomes.
15. **Attendance at the Big Hairy People and Pets Summit & Workshops:** The event being held 10-14 October on the Gold Coast, represents a prime opportunity for the Portfolio Committee members to engage with international and local experts in this space. This conference and workshops are a collaboration between AIAM, Getting 2 Zero (G2Z) and Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC) and will focus on the programs, practices and strategies that involve and engage the community in managing their pets. We will be looking at the role that organisations play in providing support to both companion animals and the people who care for them. Social change, community safety and welfare, animal management and welfare, emergency management and responsible pet ownership will be discussed at this event. More information can be found at bit.ly/PeopleandPetsSummit.
16. **Explore and adapt AMRRIC approach to companion animal management:** The ‘One Health’ approach taken by AMRRIC, (an Australian based not-for-profit, working with Aboriginal and



Torres Strait Islander communities), exemplifies significant elements of what has been discussed above. We would highly recommend consideration of exploration and adaptation of this model.

AIAM supports evidence-based, collaborative solutions for lasting improvements in companion animal welfare and management.

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Animal Management brings to this submission a wealth of expertise as the national body representing Local Government Animal Management Officers. Our Board comprises professionals dedicated to upholding best practices in companion animal management.

AIAM understands the complex pressures facing Local Governments and rescue organisations involved in companion animal management and rehoming. Our commitment lies in fostering successful, evidence-based strategies that prioritise animal welfare and harmonious human-animal coexistence.

Throughout this submission, we align the Terms of Reference with broader thematic headings, presenting factors influencing companion animal management and rehoming. We draw on successful practices from both Australia and the international community to underpin our recommendations to the Portfolio Committee.

We have used the term 'municipal shelter' in lieu of 'pound' throughout our submission, as companion animals, while legally viewed as property, are non-human members of our communities with which people share social bonds. Temporary care provided for companion animals by council-run animal care facilities should provide an equivalent standard of care to Not For Profit shelters, and therefore be recognised as such. The term 'pound' has many negative connotations that can work to create negative bias and are associated with how things used to be done. Facility and animal management workers can be unfairly judged and viewed as "less than" (as can the animals within the system) which contributes to compassion fatigue and the excessive staff turnover (Rohlf, 2018) experienced by the sector. Terms such as "shelter", "animal welfare facility" and "animal resource centre" are being used more commonly to reflect the changes in strategy and operations as well as the changing views and expectations of the community.

Throughout the document, we've intentionally utilised the terms 'sector' and 'companion animal management and rehoming system' interchangeably, without making a distinction between companion animal management and shelter and rehoming, unless this is specifically relevant to the point being made. This deliberate choice of words underscores the inseparable nature of the functions performed by various organisations within this sphere. Their collective objective is to create safer and healthier lives for both humans and pets, and as such, there is no 'us' and 'them'; Forward progress towards better human and pet welfare outcomes in the community, while in care, and post-adoption is only achievable through a collaborative approach. Facilitating progression towards this must be a priority for the Portfolio Committee during this review process.

Animal Management and Sheltering in NSW Today

At the heart of the [NSW Animal Welfare Action Plan 2018](#) lies the objective “that people responsible for animals provide for their welfare, in line with the best available science and community expectations.” Similarly, the [NSW Animal Welfare Reform Discussion Paper 2018](#) states that “Protecting the welfare of animals is a priority of the NSW Government”.

No animal should experience deterioration of health or welfare while under the protection of organisations and facilities dedicated to safeguarding both the community and its cherished companions. It is acknowledged that animals in shelters are subjected to a range of stimuli that are not conducive to good physical and behavioural health. Research shows that plasma cortisol levels become elevated upon entering the shelter as a physiological stress response (Coppola et al., 2006).

Community expectations are changing rapidly, and it is expected that the Animal Management department and associated facilities are a community asset and resource, akin to libraries, sports facilities, and pre-schools. Council animal holding facilities bear the responsibility of caring for pets belonging to the community. With the evolving community expectations and perceptions, it is imperative that a municipal shelter be a community resource that provides a high standard of care and welfare, as is expected of the community with their own pets.

The recent introduction of the [Companion Animals Amendment \(Rehoming Animals\) Bill 2022](#) presents a pivotal juncture for refining rehoming processes, enhancing transparency, and elevating record-keeping practices concerning companion animals under our care. This legislative advancement offers the opportunity to ensure that every companion animal entering the system has a viable pathway to a successful live release outcome.

However, the Amendment does not fully address the fundamental and multifaceted causes leading to the intake of companion animals into the system. The resulting challenges and suboptimal outcomes persist. There exists a global shift within the Animal Management discipline toward mitigating the root causes that drive the need for support and services for companion animals. This redirection entails empowering pet owners and caretakers to retain their animals within their homes, effectively reducing the reliance on “end stage” policies and practices such as intaking, holding, rehoming, transferring, or euthanising.

The CIE draft [‘Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW’](#) report provided a good overview of the known issues with rehoming of companion dogs and cats in NSW and presents data from NSW to support recommendations made. Therefore, we will not cover these topics in detail within this submission and will instead make recommendations for broader context changes that the state government can contribute to and that will positively impact companion animal management and rehoming in the state.

Australia and cats

The unique reproductive capacity of cats, with sexual maturity attained as early as 16 weeks old, coupled with the potential for multiple litters, underscores the profound challenge of addressing the surplus of homeless and abandoned kittens compared to puppies (Chua et al., 2023). This dynamic intricately influences the proportion of cats that can be rehomed. Additionally, the phenomenon of free-roaming, undesexed urban cats—whether owned, semi-owned, or unowned—serves to compound the issue, contributing to feral cat populations. It is imperative to acknowledge that the complexities surrounding cat breeding issues are markedly distinct from those concerning dogs.

The expectations being placed on Local Government, not for profit and community-based animal rescue and welfare organisations regarding cat management are growing rapidly. There is increasing pressure to manage domestic cats differently to how they have been managed historically. Contemporary society places immense value on evidence-based strategies that are humane, economical, and effective.

International Best Practice and industry trends

Animal management is a human issue and therefore a social issue. Hawes (Hawes et al., 2022) states that “Achieving positive and sustained change on many of today’s most pressing social issues calls for an increasingly complex understanding of social-ecological systems and the mechanisms that contribute to the resilience of a community.” This is certainly true when looking at the interface between animal management, animal welfare, environmental protection, community welfare and policy development. Traditional policy development is often characterised by a singular-issue orientation and can tend to overlook the intricate interdependencies among challenges. Globally, the approach to companion animal management and welfare is evolving into a framework that operationalises One Health and One Welfare concepts while critically addressing underlying factors (Tarazona et al., 2020).

Central to this transformative approach is the development of policies centered around humanity, cultural sensitivity, equity, environmental stewardship, diversity competence, and social justice. It is evident that punitive approaches are yielding to proactive support-based models in animal management practices (Wolf et al., 2022). The interconnectedness of the issues within the realm of animal management underscores the imperative of adopting innovative and holistic approaches for achieving transformative outcomes. It is with this perspective that we advocate for a fresh and collaborative problem-solving model to yield outcomes distinct from historical courses of action.

SUPPORTING PETS IN PLACE AND REDUCING INTAKE INTO THE SYSTEM

- (e) factors influencing the number of animals ending up in New South Wales pounds, and strategies for reducing these numbers
- (i) the challenges associated with the number of homeless cats living in New South Wales for both pounds and animal rescue organisations, and strategies for addressing this issue

The admission of animals into the animal management and rehoming system has potential to do unintended harm to both people and pets (Quain, 2019). This process introduces several challenges that lead to stress, subsequently impacting the immediate health and welfare of the animals and people involved. Transitioning from familiar environments to unfamiliar ones, confinement, isolation, transportation, handling by unfamiliar individuals, exposure to noise and unfamiliar scents are among the challenges faced. Furthermore, factors such as sleep disruption, unfamiliar diets, slippery surfaces, inadequate exercise, and enrichment opportunities contribute to boredom, frustration, and prolonged states of heightened arousal in the animals under care. In addition, the financial costs associated with admitting animals into the system, including daily care expenses, facility maintenance, and staffing, are significant considerations (Kremer, 2021). Equally important is the cost to staff well-being, encompassing moral stress and compassion fatigue, which leads to mental strain and high staff turnover rates (Paul et al., 2023). The costs to owners and caretakers of companion animals in this situation must also not be underestimated.

Therefore, we propose that stakeholders within the system collectively re-evaluate the necessity of placing each individual animal within the conventional system. It is imperative to explore the feasibility of achieving positive outcomes by providing support to animals within their existing environments or through alternative strategies. As the peak body for animal management professionals, we are consistently hearing from Local Government and non-profit/community organisations across Australia regarding substantial capacity challenges stemming predominantly from broader societal factors. These challenges exert substantial pressure on already stretched systems and the dedicated personnel involved in their daily operations. Recognising the driving forces behind this pressure is pivotal in devising alternative, more effective, and sustainable frameworks.

Owned companion animals

The influx of owned animals into the animal management system is closely linked to various human-centric factors that limit owners' capacity to care for their companion animals. A recent Australian study conducted by McDowell and colleagues utilises the Social Determinants of Health model to examine the contributors to ownership challenges and negative pet welfare outcomes (McDowall et al., 2023). This model aligns with research from Canada (Ly et al., 2021a) (Ly et al., 2021b), the United States (Hoffman et al., 2021), and a systematic review encompassing Australian studies (Lambert et al., 2015), all highlighting that factors such as unstable housing, financial stress, significant family

changes (e.g., divorce, bereavement), and limited access to necessary pet care resources play pivotal roles in companion animal relinquishment and unfavourable welfare consequences. Regrettably, the publicly available data from Office of Local Government (OLG), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals NSW (RSPCA NSW), and Animal Welfare League of NSW (AWL NSW) lacks the granularity required to ascertain whether the experiences in New South Wales mirror these trends. Consequently, it is encouraged that more comprehensive data collection be prioritised to facilitate the development of targeted preventative strategies, which will be expanded upon later in this submission.

In contrast to past approaches focused on education and enforcement in animal management, achieving a decline in intake rates and enhancing animal welfare entails a multifaceted strategy. This includes providing field support to both pets and owners to enhance owners' ability to care for their animals (as demonstrated in the joint statement by leading US organisations on [maintaining Capacity For Care through field support services](#) and the [Best Friends Intake Diversion in the Field Playbook](#)). Diverting pets through direct rehoming where feasible (Ly & Protopopova, 2023a), and advocating for societal shifts that empower more individuals to retain their pets, such as modifications to rental laws and the provision of widespread accessible and free or low-cost desexing and veterinary services ([Humane Pro Pets For Life](#)), are all integral components of this approach.

Significant findings from existing programs and research in this domain inform the implementation of owner support services. For instance:

- The [National Desexing Network Cooperative Desexing](#) program has been very effective in the Gold Coast City Council (Qld) area (an area with a population of around 635,000 people). The costs of this program are shared between the Council, owner, local Vet Clinics and the National Desexing Network. If there are NFP animal welfare groups in the area with capacity, they are also encouraged to participate in the program. The intake of cats from the GCCC area has steadily decreased from over 3500 annually to around 2000 cats annually from FY 01/02 to 18/19. The intake of kittens has roughly halved from 3830 in FY 01/02 to 1847 20/21. The program has also been delivered in other municipalities around Australia e.g. Camden Council (NSW) (human population 94,000) which has seen a [reduction of cat intake](#) of over 70% for the FY periods 11/12 – 17/18.
- Field-based support services consistently yield superior outcomes for both owners and pets, surpassing the effectiveness of shelter-based services for owners seeking to relinquish their pets (Seattle Animal Shelter Foundation, 2022 "[Shelter diversion keeps pets happy, healthy, and with their families](#)")
- Pet retention and intake diversion programs have led to substantial reductions in surrendered pet intake by as much as 50% ([Jacksonville Humane Society](#)) and 87% (Ly & Protopopova, 2023b)
- Field officers achieve improved compliance, better relationships with the community, and reduced intake of pets into the system by taking a holistic, 'support first' approach to animal management (Moss et al., 2023).

- Online, owner-assisted rehoming programs are a viable and legitimate approach to diverting intake of pets, through both owner retention of their pet and direct rehoming outside of the system (Ly & Protopopova, 2023b). This is supported by the outcomes that have been achieved in the PetRescue's [Home2Home](#) program.
- Barriers to proactive program implementation by local governments are frequently tied to funding and staffing limitations (Russo et al., 2023).
- Proactive programs have also been successful in Australia, with examples such as the award winning [West Cairns Animal Management Pilot Project](#) demonstrating successful collaboration to achieve improvements in animal management, welfare and human health outcomes.

The persistent issue of underfunding in companion animal management within local governments (discussed in more detail below) and non-profit organisations that provide animal shelter services underscores the need for funding models that aren't solely reliant on intake and rehoming numbers. There is currently little to no scope for anyone in the sector to overcome these barriers without building capacity for proactive strategies to support pets in place.

Free living cats

In contrast to dogs, the influx of cats into the animal management system primarily stems from the admission of community cats. These community cat intakes exhibit a seasonal pattern, as highlighted in the [CIE Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW report](#). Notably, in densely populated areas, free-living cat populations often coexist with human communities, although the individuals caring for these cats seldom perceive themselves as traditional owners (Zito et al., 2015) (Zito et al., 2018).

An analysis of the intake data accessible on the Office of Local Government [website](#) underscores that while adoption rates are gradually on the rise (increasing from 17% to 21% between 2017/18 and 2021/22), the incremental increase is insufficient to yield a substantial impact on the overall number of cats necessitating live release pathways. Concurrently, transfers to other organisations appear to have stabilised, indicating a plateau in available capacity. While the exact return-to-owner rate remains challenging to ascertain due to a lack of intake source data, it aligns with Australian research indicating a national return-to-owner rate of approximately 5% (Chua et al., 2023). This accord between the provided data (4.5% to 5.6% from 2017/18 to 2021/22) and the broader Australian trend fits with what we know, that the intake of “stray” cats far outweighs that of owned cats which suggests that many the cats in municipal shelters do not have an “owner” to reclaim them (Marston & Bennett, 2009).

It is imperative to consider whether the inclusion of these community cats within the system is truly necessary, or if a more efficacious, financially sustainable, and socially acceptable alternative pathway could be established to regulate the reproductive dynamics of community cat populations and mitigate the influx of kittens and young adult cats into the system.

We can look to both international and Australian examples of how this can be achieved through working together with the community to desex, microchip and vaccinate community cats, and where possible adopt out sociable cats or where possible, support caretakers to become cat owners.

We have three robust Australian examples of how effective this approach can be:

- The [Banyule Desexing Program in Victoria](#) which demonstrated a remarkable two thirds reduction in intake, more than a 5 fold reduction in euthanasia, and improvements in relationships between animal management staff and community members, through targeted free desexing of cats from high intake areas.
- The [Community Cat Programs](#) led by the [Australian Pet Welfare Foundation](#) with the initial pilot area in the greater Ipswich area of Queensland, where microtargeting of cats from high intake properties reduced in cat intakes by council by 30-50% within one year.
- The RSPCA NSW '[Keeping Cats Safe at Home](#)' program in which RSPCA partners with councils to implement proactive and targeted desexing of cats cared for by local community members, using microtargeting to quickly reduce free-living cat populations.

Another approach to consider is the [Shelter-Neuter-Release \(SNR\) program delivered in the City of San Jose](#) (USA) (population 1.2 million). This program yielded a significant 27% decline in cat intake from fiscal year 2008-09 to 2013/14, incurring an annual cost of approximately \$560,000. In contrast, if a 27% reduction through lethal means were pursued, it would necessitate euthanising around 100,000 cats annually, amounting to approximately \$22.8 million in expenses.

We are aware of the opposition to this approach that is voiced by some members of the conservation sector. However, we maintain that as total eradication of free roaming cats is not practical or viable, having desexed populations is a better option than having free roaming cats that are capable of reproduction.

Similar to other proactive approaches to companion animal management, barriers to implementation of proactive programs for managing community cats at local council level appear to be mainly due to lack of funding and staff time.

To progress beyond the existing scenario of overwhelming capacity constraints across the sector, it is crucial to delineate the responsibilities for provisioning proactive companion animal support services. This necessitates revisiting existing companion animal legislative and regulatory frameworks, conveying revised expectations to relevant stakeholders, and allocating the requisite funding and resources to enable effective implementation.

Moreover, a broader discourse concerning increased access to veterinary services and the provision of [High-Quality, High-Volume Spay/Neuter](#) services to local governments should be undertaken in collaboration with the veterinary sector, including universities and established shelter medicine teams capable of mentoring veterinarians in these practices. Financial and regulatory support for these

specialised services is also required to increase capacity and availability of these services (Bushby, 2020).

The AIAM-endorsed [G2Z Australian Cat Action Plan](#), developed by Getting 2 Zero, offers a pragmatic blueprint for Government and non-government entities alike to enhance domestic cat management and welfare, encompassing numerous strategies in alignment with recommendations. Additional recommended international resources for government animal management include [Managing Community Cats: A guide for Municipal leaders](#) and [Effective Animal Management for building humane communities](#), which provide valuable insights for navigating these challenges.

QUALITY OF CARE WITHIN MUNICIPAL SHELTERS

- (b) the adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in New South Wales
- (c) welfare challenges facing animals in pounds across New South Wales, including the provision of housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing
- (d) the adequacy of the laws, regulations and codes governing New South Wales pounds, including the Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) and the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments (1996), as well as the adequacy of the current enforcement and compliance regime

General care of pet within municipal shelters

Addressing concerns regarding the quality of care within municipal shelters necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the parameters constituting favourable welfare conditions for companion animals housed in such facilities. Key components encompass facility design, staffing levels, daily interactions and care protocols, length of stay, and healthcare provisions, all of which directly impact the physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being of the animals housed in the facility.

The [Association of Shelter Veterinarians \(ASV\) Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animals Shelters](#) (the Guidelines) provide referenced, evidence-based recommendations for minimum and best practice short term (up to 14 days) care of animals in shelters, and these should be used to guide recommendations and standards of care for animals in NSW municipal shelters.

Additionally, to function effectively all facilities should be using population management software and data collection systems. This empowers real-time monitoring of [capacity for care](#), facilitating prompt adjustments to internal procedures as needed.

According to the Guidelines, for animals housed beyond two weeks, prioritising alternative housing arrangements is crucial. In these cases, foster placement emerges as the most suitable solution for prolonged care. Where this isn't feasible, larger enclosures and heightened daily interaction,

socialisation with both humans and fellow animals, and enrichment activities are imperative to mitigate behavioural degradation during shelter stays.

Currently, the standards outlined in the [NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 - Dogs and Cats in Animal Boarding Establishments](#) fall short of the Guidelines and fail to align with Shelter Medicine's best practices concerning infection control and care provision for potentially unwell or distressed animals. Compounding these challenges, anecdotal evidence suggests that several NSW local governments operate substantially above their capacity for care, with some facilities exceeding humane limits for housing dogs and cats for durations surpassing 24 hours. While Victoria has mandated its Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds, it also falls short of being considered optimal practice and is outdated.

These situations persist despite a lack of functional volunteer and foster care programs in many municipal shelters, and only approximately half of NSW councils rehoming animals directly. In parallel, the adoption pathways available to municipal shelters remain underutilised, with over a third of councils listing available pets solely on their own websites or social media, forgoing the benefits of widely accessible platforms like [PetRescue](#) and [SavourLife](#), which expedite pathways to adoption.

While municipal shelters are not making optimal use of all animal pathways available to them to achieve live outcomes for pets, it is unacceptable for these same facilities to be functioning beyond their capacity for care, or for humane killing to be considered as an option for addressing overcrowding. Furthermore, policies stipulating desexing prior to adoption are essential for any entity involved in rehoming/selling companion animals.

The shift towards developing large municipal shelters serving multiple councils (often referred to as "super pounds"), particularly in lower socioeconomic communities for the sake of "economy of scale," raises concerns. Research by Andrews (Andrews, 2022) highlights key factors predicting live animal outcomes in shelters in the United States, including:

- Economic status of the community in which the shelter is located, with shelters located in communities experiencing poverty being less likely to achieve live outcomes;
- Shelter size, with larger shelters less likely to achieve live outcomes than smaller shelters;
- Shelter type, with private organisations being slightly more likely to achieve live outcomes than comparable municipal shelters; and
- Existence of transport networks with shelters, who utilise transport to move animals to and from rehoming partners being more likely to achieve live outcomes.

'Warehouse' style facilities with large animal wards housing the majority of an animal cohort also [increase the risk of infectious disease transmission and limit outbreak responses](#); housing that is suitable for a boarding kennel full of healthy animals with a known vaccination and disease status differs significantly from humane housing for sheltered animals of unknown vaccination and disease status.

In short, multiple-council shelters taking in large numbers of animals with limited ability to manage infectious disease effectively and comparatively few resources to provide quality individual care, are simply less able to achieve live outcomes than smaller, better designed facilities with a full suite of animal care programming.

Critical to this discourse is the need for well-designed facilities operated by trained personnel to ensure optimal animal care and outcomes. With limited options for shelter-specific training in Australia (there are no providers for the [Animal Shelter Worker Skillset](#) nationally), the sector lacks professionalisation and ongoing staff education. Practical training and continued education are vital to guaranteeing proper animal care practices (Howard & Digennaro Reed, 2015), prioritising [animal welfare](#), and fostering [positive individual and team morale](#).

We encourage the Portfolio Committee to consider the following actions at the state level:

- Provide (or support AIAM to provide) councils with access to a library of accurate, evidence-based reference materials and resources for [facility design](#), [animal care](#), [infectious disease control](#), [animal behaviour](#), development of internal protocols such [foster care](#) and [volunteer programs](#), and [community support programs](#) that directly affect the welfare of animals and staff.
- Equip councils with [shelter population management software](#) or require its use. This software should be capable of evaluating and monitoring [basic intake and outcome statistics](#), [capacity for care](#), and [additional companion animal services provided by the council](#) beyond the municipal shelter.
- Issue a guidance statement advising against large, multi-council 'warehouse' style facilities that hinder individualised care and jeopardise animal outcomes.
- Explore mechanisms to support Registered Training Organisations in providing shelter-specific training or provide accessible, regular education opportunities for municipal shelter teams.

SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE COMPANION ANIMAL MANAGEMENT AND SHELTERING: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR PETS AND PEOPLE

- (f) euthanasia rates and practices in New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of reporting of euthanasia rates and other statistics
- (g) the role and challenges of behavioural assessments in New South Wales pounds
- (h) the relationship between New South Wales pounds and animal rescue organisations
- (j) strategies for improving the treatment, care and outcomes for animals in New South Wales pounds

Standards of behaviour assessment, and common adoption advertising and placement practices vary widely across NSW, and do not appear to be informed by current evidence-based practices in the sector.

To bolster the speed and success of rehoming efforts, municipal shelters should consider adopting contemporary sheltering practices, including:

- Systematic assessment of animal behaviour over time and across multiple contexts, involving improved training of general staff in objective behaviour observations and note taking, improved assessment processes around dog-dog sociability, and increased literacy in the [limitations and caveats of using applied behaviour assessments](#) in a shelter environment (Rayment et al., 2015) ([Rayment, 2017](#)).
- Improved understanding of the factors influencing success of shelter pet marketing (Zadeh et al., 2022) (Becerra et al., 2020), pre-adoption matching (O'Connor et al., 2017), adoption meets (Minnis et al., 2022), and long term placement in adoptive homes (Dinwoodie et al., 2022) (Thumpkin et al., 2022).
- Recognising the significance of foster care for potential high-risk placements (Thumpkin et al., 2022) and the role of post-adoption support in ensuring successful placements (Griffin et al., 2022) (Gates et al., 2018).
- Improved management of pets in shelter environments including the benefits and safe, effective provision of enrichment (Dare & Strasser, 2023) [training and behaviour modification](#) (Luescher & Tyson Medlock, 2009) and [conspecific socialisation programs](#).

We encourage the Portfolio Committee to consider established models, such as [Human Animal Support Services](#) or [Socially Conscious Sheltering](#), which offer guidance on supporting, assessing, and placing sheltered pets. These models can potentially serve as guiding principles, fostering greater consistency among organisations in the NSW sector.

To further support these efforts, we recommend that the NSW government expands its reporting structures to encompass all registered organisations within the sector. These structures should align with modern reporting standards, such as the [Shelter Animals Count Basic Matrix](#). This collected data should be made publicly available and inform funding, compliance, and regulatory actions related to companion animals. We support the recommendations made by Chua et al (Chua et al., 2023) that state data bases operate using nationally agreed standard definitions and methods for generating statistics from individual agencies which is then fed into a national database. This will enable existing management strategies to be evaluated and better allocation of resources for management strategies known to be effective.

It is noteworthy that not-for-profit animal shelters and rescue organisations bear a significant burden in achieving live release outcomes for dogs and cats in NSW, with 25-40% of animals being transferred from municipal shelters from 17/18 to 21/22 according to the [OLG website](#). This may contribute to strained relations between these non-profits and local governments. Collaborative partnerships with stakeholders in each community are pivotal for addressing this issue effectively. Recognising that no single entity possesses the resources to resolve companion animal management challenges, collaboration, cooperation, and transparency become the cornerstones for nurturing a positive



relationship between local government and NFP groups. This approach not only enhances budgetary efficiency and social acceptance but also reduces intake and improves service provision.

The City of Calgary, Canada, [implemented a strategy](#) that ensured both the regulatory and ethical aspects of pet ownership were addressed. Bill Bruce and colleagues developed an effective community engagement model that has helped the “stick” side of the Calgary Animal & Bylaw Services department’s animal control work to become secondary. He reported that high return to owner rates and low euthanasia numbers can be credited to the programs implemented. Registration income funds the municipality’s pound & shelter and its veterinary clinic, a free desexing program for those in the community on a low income and other programs designed to get pets adopted, reunite pets with their owners, resolve animal related disputes and provide emergency medical care for injured pets. The department works closely with the Calgary Humane Society, local rescue groups, veterinarians, breeders and animal advocates – stakeholders with a desire to see lost and stray animals returned home and reduce unnecessary euthanasia.

FUNDING AND FACILITATING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMPANION ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

- (a) resourcing challenges affecting New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds by local and state governments

The ongoing challenge of funding animal management services has been a persistent topic within the broader local government sector. The concept of companion animal management as a 'user pays' service has been criticised for its flawed premise (e.g., [Pert, 2001](#)). As discussed earlier, there has been a rapid evolution in community expectations, viewing the treatment and future of animals as an integral part of Council's social services provision rather than merely animal welfare or management concerns. This transformation reflects the animals' place within families and the community, influencing Council's broader service delivery and public perception.

Rate payers are no longer satisfied with a “pound” only delivered from insufficient facilities. Accessibility to the facility, rehoming programs and standards of care for those animals housed are significant public issues. There will always be the need for a service to take in unwanted and stray animals but, as previously discussed, community expectations and how we do that is changing rapidly. Showing compassion towards stray and surrendered cats and dogs by providing comfortable care and housing, vet treatment and desexing prior to adoption and minimising euthanasia of healthy animals, are expected by today’s community. Transparent, collaborative efforts with the community to ensure high rehoming rates and accessible desexing assistance have the potential to garner substantial support for achieving both animal management and welfare objectives. Forming partnerships with reputable animal welfare organisations can yield additional benefits, such as volunteer support from trained and experienced staff in animal health and behaviour, as well as access to external rescue networks. This collaboration can free up Council resources for other important matters.



The fundamental objective of companion animal management services is to foster safe and harmonious coexistence between animals and people within our communities. This endeavour benefits all community members, not just pet owners in isolation, and therefore should be regarded as a core service that councils offer to their communities. Notably, a considerable portion of animals, particularly [urban stray cats](#), lack registered owners to financially contribute to local government services. However, effectively managing these populations positively enhances community amenities.

Analogous to general ratepayers supporting various council services such as parks, sports facilities, libraries, and other community-oriented amenities, companion animal management should also be perceived as a shared communal responsibility. Recent cost estimates for all NSW councils indicate around \$34 million is allocated to animal management at the present level ([Centre For International Economics, 2022](#)), within the context of approximately \$1.9 billion spent on public order, safety, and health. When compared to the significant allocations of \$2.1 billion on recreational and cultural services, and \$2.3 billion on environmental management services, including waste management ([NSW OLG, 2023](#)), it becomes evident that local government animal management departments face serious under-funding challenges.

The continuing education and upskilling of those involved in Local Government companion animal management, at any level, is an area that presents a prime opportunity for increased funding and prioritisation. For example, membership of AIAM enables access to the significant library of resources available via our website, as well as direct support from the organisation itself. We also highly recommend attendance at the annual AIAM Workshops and biannual G2Z National Summit.

Councils have brought to light the issue of cost shifting in regulatory animal services, resulting in funding shortfalls for companion animal regulation. These constraints limit the capacity to recover costs through the current Companion Animal Act framework ([Local Government NSW, 2018](#)). The prevailing financing structure for local government's provision of companion animal management services primarily emphasises regulation and enforcement, and even within this framework, funding falls short, preventing councils from exploring proactive strategies to enhance compliance and uplift outcomes for both people and pets in NSW communities.

Considering these challenges, we strongly urge the Portfolio Committee to explore alternative funding models for companion animal management services. Drawing inspiration from how other family and community services are financed by local government, there's a need to shift away from the 'user pays' approach. Existing funding models for other services should be considered as a blueprint to ensure sustainable funding for companion animal management that aligns with the evolving expectations of our communities.

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